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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

State Department review completed

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30 November 1966

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Information as of 1600

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HIGHLIGHTS

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
US troops encountered a Viet Cong force in north-western Bien Hoa Province early on 30 November; nearly 50 of the enemy were killed (Para. 1). ARVN troops discovered another Communist prison camp in the Mekong Delta (Para. 2). A group of South Vietnamese irregulars captured at A Chau last spring have been released by the Viet Cong (Paras. 3-4).

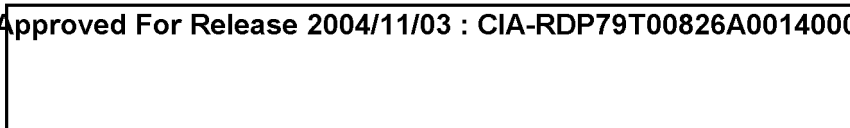
II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The Constituent Assembly continued its debate on 29 November on individual rights to be included in the constitution, sparking a heated exchange on the question of land reform (Paras. 1-2). The assembly on 30 November raised the sensitive issue of civilian-military relations by recommending that military officers resign their commissions before assuming any government or political post under the constitution (Paras. 3-5). After consultation with allied governments, the GVN announced three separate cease-fire periods covering the Christmas, New Year's, and Tet holidays (Para. 6).

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V. Communist Political Developments: DRV Premier Pham Van Dong is reported to have said that Hanoi expects the US to increase its bombing program, and that the DRV not only is capable of dealing with such an increase but would match it with one of its own (Paras. 1-3).

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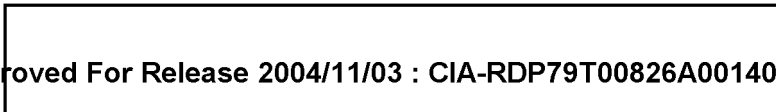


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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. A five-man patrol of the US 1st Infantry Division encountered a Communist force of over 80 men early on 30 November in an area about 32 miles northeast of Saigon in northwestern Bien Hoa Province. Reinforcements and armed aircraft were rushed to the scene. Preliminary reports show that nearly 50 Viet Cong were killed, 35 by the air strikes and the others by ground action.

2. South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) soldiers discovered a Viet Cong prisoner camp in the Mekong Delta on 29 November. The ARVN troops were led to the camp by three civilians who said they were once prisoners there. The camp was situated in heavy mangrove swamps west of Vinh Long city in the delta province of Vinh Long. Fourteen civilians were found alive and four others--including two women--were found dead, and their bodies reportedly mutilated.

Captured Defenders of A Shau Return to Allied Control

3. A group of 21 Vietnamese, identified as CIDG personnel who were among the defenders of the A Shau Special Forces Camp which was overrun and destroyed on 7 March, have returned to US control. They were among 69 captives taken by the Communists to a POW camp in Laos where they received an extensive month-long political indoctrination. In July, the captives were moved to another camp somewhere in South Vietnam.

4. The irregulars claimed they were not mistreated during their detention, although they received only limited medical care and insufficient food. On 19 November, the prisoners were told they could go back to the Americans or remain with the Viet Cong. Only three of the group elected to stay. The others were furnished a Montagnard guide and a five-day supply of rice.

5. The VC have been known on several occasions in the past to release ARVN prisoners after several months of detention and attempts at indoctrination.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Constituent Assembly on 29 November continued its debate on constitutional rights and duties. It readily approved the 12 basic rights proposed by the constitution drafting committee and discussed on 28 November, but allowed for further debate on the wording and nuances of these rights when the actual draft constitution is considered by the assembly.

2. Two of four additional individual rights were also accepted in principle by the assembly. One of these dealt with the fundamental issue of land reform and became the subject of a heated and disorderly debate. Three formulations--in varying degrees of specificity--were proposed which, in effect, pledged the government to a policy of land reform. Dr. Phan Quang Dan led the fight for the most specific pledge, but received little support; Hoa Hao delegates from the delta were the most vociferous opponents of any such commitment. According to the assembly's procedural rules, none of the three versions received the required number of votes. Chairman Phan Khac Suu insisted, however, that the issue was too important to be ignored, and the assembly then selected the vaguest of the proposals, which states that "the policy of the state (is) to make citizens property owners."

3. On 30 November, the assembly was scheduled to vote on the two remaining proposals regarding individual rights, and on the four basic individual duties of the individual which have already been proposed by the drafting committee. According to press reports, the assembly in this session recommended that all military men must resign their commissions before assuming a government or political post under the constitution. As reported by the press, the wording of this provision would necessitate a fundamental change in the present administrative system of the government in which military, political, and administrative authority is combined in the offices of corps commanders, and province and district chiefs, who, almost without exception, are military officers.

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4. Such a proposal dramatizes the general question of civilian-military relations. The delegates are apparently quite sensitive on the issue of military influence. For example, the assembly previously had asked the government to allow assembly delegates who are military officers to resign their commissions rather than remain in a leave status.

5. In a recent conversation with US Embassy officers, officials of the Revolutionary Dai Viet party, which leads the largest bloc in the assembly, left the clear impression that civilian-military relations overshadows all other constitutional issues, possibly to the extent of determining the fundamental form of the future government. Although generally favoring a presidential system, party leader Ha Thuc Ky stated that he was seriously considering proposals for a parliamentary system because he feared military dominance of a presidential system. He expressed the view that the only way to safeguard civilian interests in a presidential system would be to have a transitional government--rather than the present GVN--carry out presidential elections. Although these remarks may have been purposely overstated, they are, nevertheless, indicative of feelings toward the military in various civilian quarters.

Allied Truces Announced

6. After consultation with allied governments, the GVN on 30 November announced three separate cease-fire periods--Christmas, New Year's, and Tet (the lunar new year). The 48-hour Christmas and New Year's cease-fire periods correspond exactly with those already announced by the Viet Cong. The allied cease-fire for Tet will be in effect for four days--8-12 February 1967. The Viet Cong have not announced a Tet cease-fire period but are expected to do so in accordance with past practice. Allied forces were given standing orders to take any necessary measures for self-defense during the three truce periods.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong is reported to have told [redacted]

[redacted] that the DRV expected the US to increase its bombing program, and that the North Vietnamese were capable of dealing with this increase and would match it with an escalation of their own. [redacted] the evacuation of Hanoi was continuing and that by the end of the year only 100,000 people would remain in the city.

2. Pham Van Dong's comment on the DRV's intention to match any escalation of US bombing was probably made for propaganda purposes. [redacted]

[redacted] there were no schools operating in Hanoi proper. Even though there are some children still living in the city, they are transported to the outskirts to go to school.

3. Reports on the effectiveness of the evacuation vary widely. The regime's reports appear overly optimistic. Most non-Communist observers agree that the evacuation is proceeding neither as fast nor as effectively as the regime would like. As the two reports above indicate, however, the authorities are keeping up the pressure and will probably eventually succeed in getting the city's population down to manageable proportions--with only strategic offices and minimum staffs remaining in the city. This determined and continuing effort in itself reflects an apparent willingness on Hanoi's part to accept the bombing of its capital city as a cost of the war.

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